

Christian churches must be a part of their communities

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Being an architect and a Christian, and being a Christian architect, I struggle with the interconnection of the concepts of Christianity and concepts of architecture in a way that keeps the values of both in a healthy balance. In addition, being something of a student in land planning trends, I see another layer of thinking that threatens that healthy balance.

The balance is threatened by the word change. Architecture can change and land planning can change; but Christianity, if it is pure and based on the Word of God, should not change. Therefore we must seek out architecture and land planning that can change with those things that are not discussed in scripture, and hold to those things that are.

Scripture does not tell us how to design churches, nor does it tell us how to design our communities. What it does tell us is that we should not neglect the gathering of ourselves together. From there on it becomes how we gather together in an economy of scale that is commensurate with our culture and our interaction with our community.

For the past decade I have been concerned with the trends that impact the church as a whole and the individual congregations that pepper our landscape here in America. The changes that cause my concern are both internal and external to the church. Internal in the sense that congregations are changing the way that they gather together; external in the way that communities allow them to do so, and external in the way that American culture is changing.

I heard a pastor today say that people on average, have only two close friends, the kind that you can call at two in the morning with a problem and still expect to be friends. Two decades ago, the average was six.

In a time when churches want to be more community oriented, want to help people build bridges of friendship and give people a physically and spiritually safe place to go, and to help Christians to become more aware of their relationship with the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, communities seek to bring people together, to be reliant upon each other and upon their government, and to fill their voids without God.

While this is all happening, churches are working hard to maintain their memberships, and the churches that do grow are growing mostly through transfer of memberships from other churches instead of through conversions.

Some communities look at churches and increasingly see more negatives than positives; when a pastor or church staff member or church member is convicted of a crime, the secular say that Christians are no better than anyone else, when in reality, evil people who are not Christians go to churches for easy pickings to prey upon gentle and good people, especially children.

Some communities look at churches – especially large ones – as something of a nuisance, or even as parasites upon the community. After all, their large numbers frequently cause traffic jams and because they pay no taxes, they are taking, not giving, to the community.

To be fair, there are still communities who see the value of the presence of churches in their midst because churches have a positive effect of reducing crime, benefiting marriages and producing children that will be positive to society. Sincere Christians not only don't commit crimes, they teach their children and others to be the same.

But America, just like the rest of the world, has begun to fall away from God, and as a result has begun to think of Christianity as a religion among other religions, and other religions breed evil people, Islam in particular. As more people take on the misconception that Christianity is no different than any other, it is not hard to understand why they reject it, both personally and within their communities.

That leaves churches in a dilemma – how do they fit into their community in a way that is positive and acceptable, but also in a way that the church can function in the way that Jesus wants it to function.

It is an undeniable fact, when the facts of our beginning are considered, that America was formed on the principles of Christianity, and that the rights and freedoms depended upon the acceptance of the concept that if our rights came from God, no government could take them away.

As our society and our government become more secular, it is imperative that Christians remain in and become more a part of our communities. Churches will need to change some things in order to maintain their place in their communities, without changing what Christianity truly is.

Therein lies the challenge for the church. Finding the answer is an awesome responsibility.

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